

DNRC – Whitefish Trust Land Plan Issues and Goals Workshops – June 24th and 25th, 2003

Community members and other interested persons were provided with a brief overview which included a Power Point © presentation of the Whitefish Trust Land planning process at a general public meeting held on June 23rd, 2003. The DNRC provided answers to questions raised at the meetings on May 12th, 2003 and there was an opportunity to sign up for one of four workshops. Approximately 70-75 persons attended the June 23rd meeting which was held at the O'Shaughnessy Center in Whitefish.

At the beginning of each workshop, attendees were presented with a list of issues/concerns that were drawn from public comments at the May 12th meeting and a list of suggested goals. The goals were developed, based on the mission of the Montana Trust Land division of the DNRC and the issues. The issues and goals are as follows:

Issues Presented

- \$ Loss of open space and traditional recreation on Trust Lands
- \$ Diminished access to recreational lands through road closures and changing uses on adjacent lands
- \$ Lack of funding to manage recreational uses on state lands
- \$ Effects of state trust land uses on adjacent property values and vice versa
- \$ Impacts on infrastructure and environment
- \$ Long term revenue generating capacity
- \$ Meaningful public participation

Goals Presented

- \$ Generate revenue for the beneficiaries based on fair market value of trust lands
- \$ Maintain future generating capacity of trust lands
- \$ Provide public access, recreation and open space opportunities
- \$ Provide for management of the land for various uses
- \$ Provide for wildlife, fisheries and vegetative habitat
- \$ Minimize negative impacts on soil and water resources
- \$ Provide a predictable guide for [evaluating] uses on identified trust lands addressing infrastructure, services, local land use policy, and the natural environment

Attendees at each workshop were asked to introduce themselves and talk about which lands they currently use and how. Then they were asked to offer their ideas as to how the plan might address these issues and goals. The results of each workshop and a list of attendees follows.

Workshop #1 – 7:30 AM, Tuesday, June 24th, 2003, O’Shaughnessy Center

Attendees:

Bick Smith
Brian Schott
Stephanie Sunshine
Tyler Tourville
Greg Poncin

Notes and Comments:

Beaver-Skyles Lakes is currently used by hikers, bikers, equestrians, anglers, cabin lease holders and swimmers. It is viewed as being the most “pristine” of the areas under study; and boasts six lakes and remarkable natural beauty. The eastern piece of the Beaver Lake Study area is part of the viewshed on the west side of Whitefish lake and “holds the keys” to that section of privately held land directly on the lake. Continued public access to these lakes is extremely important. Beaver Lake is a marketable piece of property.

Recent road building in the area (in association with timber sales and other activity) has discouraged mountain biking. It use to be possible to bike on the east side of Whitefish Lake, around to Beaver Lake, but now it can’t be done.

More camping and hiking should be available at Beaver Lake.

Stillwater – Why are we only considering the bottom piece of the Stillwater area? Maps should show the extent of the Stillwater piece in order for the public to understand the lands as a whole and to be able to visualize alternative land uses more easily. The Stillwater area probably is least influenced by development pressures.

Swift Creek – The area includes Smith Lake as well as Swift Creek and offers fishing, swimming, hiking, dog walking and access to the ridge line to Polebridge for biking and hiking. The parking lot at Swift Creek is used as a staging area by snowmobile users. The logging in that area was nicely done and provides for good recreational opportunities. Additional development at Swift Creek would put additional pressure on the road infrastructure. The road serves the east side of Whitefish Lake and is dangerous. The road does serve as a scenic road for cyclists and walkers. Additional development would impact this road and increase its danger.

Note: The “Sugarman” trade at the north end of the lake which has been in negotiation for nine years would deny access to trust lands.

Haskill Basin

This is accessed by Gas Line Road (?) which goes through Stoltze Lumber Land and on to the Big Mountain recreational area. The area provides access for snowmobiling and mountain biking. Stoltze has accommodated recreationists and has accepted the associated liability over time.

General Comments

We can't choose to keep just one area for recreation under this plan. All the lands are valuable for recreation. But, can we use lands elsewhere to trade on value?

Lands should be considered in the "bigger" picture, particularly as we evaluate revenue opportunities. It is important to know how much revenue has been generated over time. Can the community replace this revenue?

DNRC – the Northwest region sells approximately 23.5 to 28 million board feet per year, generating \$8,000 per year. There is really no "hard and fast" amount that the DNRC is trying to reach. The plan attempts to balance the need to compensate the trust with community values.

Ideas

- \$ Open Space Bonds – the community, through some sort of inter-local government agreement, could sell a bond to compensate the Trust for continued recreational uses on the land. User fees, permits and licenses could be used to retire the debt
- \$ Public Private Partnerships – Private developers could develop portions of the land and maintain the rest for publicly accessed recreation. Essentially, the developer pays for the open space conservation.
- \$ Conservation Licenses – DNRC can sell conservation licenses as a way of generating income while maintaining open space and public access. (Conservation *Easements* have to be held by Fish, Wildlife and Parks.)
- \$ User Fees – People are willing to pay to use the land, understanding the need to maintain the land and to compensate the Trust.

Other Thoughts – We need to think in a larger context – looking at all the lands in the region as we plan for these specific lands. We have to be "smart" as we plan for growth. It is important to understand "how much" the Trust should be compensated in order to develop sound and feasible ideas. It is also important that future uses of the land be sensitive to adjacent property owners.

Workshop #2 – 7:00 P.M, Tuesday, June 24th, 2003, O’Shaughnessy Center

Attendees:

Patrick Sullivan
Robin Hedstrom
Diann Heivilin
Michelle Anderson
Seth Schnebel
Allison Drollinger
Bev O’Brien
Corey Ledbetter
Lori Miller
Peggy Drayer
Ted Steiner
Lisa Stamy
Russ Porter
Martina Lantin
Jen Grace
Kevin Woodrow
Mary Witbrod
Sue Carstens
Adele Valentino
Durae Daniels
Steve Thompson

Notes and Comments:

Spencer Lake Area – People enjoy mountain biking here. The Whitefish Rifle Club has maintained a range here since 1969. People living along the KM Ranch road enjoy biking and are concerned about crowding. People enjoy walking their dogs in the area of Whitefish Hills (to the east of Spencer) and are concerned about more residential development. People living on KM Ranch Road enjoy “back door” recreation offered at Spencer. Spencer Lake represents the “line in the sand” – people do not want to give the recreational and open space amenities associated with Spencer.

Beaver-Skyles Lake – The land should be protected from development and residential track housing. People enjoy walking, biking and skiing in the Skyles Lake area. This area has personal meaning too – personal attachments (anniversary celebrations, for example).

Swift Creek – People enjoy taking their dogs for walks in this area and for general recreation. The Swift Creek drainage/watershed is an important resource and should be protected.

Haskill Basin – People enjoy skiing and biking at Haskill.

Happy Valley – People hike, bike and take their dogs for walks at Happy Valley. The land also has scenic value.

General Comments – People enjoy hunting on these lands. For those that live in Whitefish, all of these lands are used for recreation – for dog walking and biking. Keeping the land as it is, is best for the School Trust in the long run. Lands should be managed with regard to the wildland/urban interface with respect to fire. Folks are sorry to see changes – loss of access and increasing development on lands adjacent to Trust Lands. The plan should address the privatization of lands. The plan should keep at least a portion of lands in recreational use. The plan should address the wildlife corridor associated with these lands – for bear deer and elk so that the next generation can continue to enjoy these areas.

People enjoy living in the close knit Whitefish community and surrounding areas. The area provides easy access to recreation and people don't want to rely on their cars to access recreational areas.

Ideas

- \$ Consider supplementing current uses with other income. Continue well designed timber sales and add recreational income. However, we need to know the starting point and the target we are striving for.
- \$ Consider land trades with the Forest Service to manage recreational lands
- \$ Sell and open space bond and make bonds for sale within the community.
- \$ The range of scenarios should include open space and recreational uses
- \$ Public access easements should be required for any development
- \$ Developments, when they occur, should be clustered
- \$ Developments should be evaluated for their impact on the aquifer
- \$ Developments should be assessed fire impact fees
- \$ Consider concessions as lessees who also manage creation – motels and campgrounds (costs?)
- \$ Recreational Land Use Licenses may be less bureaucratic.
- \$ Development leases should have built in protections
- \$ The right to development can be “transferred” elsewhere...similar to an easement.
- \$ Long term easements – what are the costs?
- \$ Local/regional organizations can sell memberships and permits
- \$ Calculate the relationship of open space to the area's economy

Other Thoughts – It is a problem that recreational lands have a higher value as developable lands.

Workshop #3 – 7:30 AM, Wednesday, June 25th, 2003, O’Shaughnessy Center

Attendees:

Holly Apple
Jenessa Craig
Kaia Peterson
Bob Sandman
Christine Hensleigh
Ron Brunk

Notes and Comments:

Beaver Lake – Access to Beaver Lake is being diminished over time.

Haskill Basin – People bike, hike snow shoe and cross country ski at Haskill. Concerned about land lost because of Iron Horse development.

General Comments – People are concerned about losing their “playground”. Spencer, Haskill and Beaver Lake all provide opportunities for biking and hiking. People are concerned with the general loss of open space and see this natural environment as part of the community. There is a concern that the Whitefish area will become another “Park City”, Utah. Gated communities can “tear at the fiber” of a community. All of these lands provide hiking and biking opportunities. People want to understand what is involved in managing these lands. It is not just about the money.

DNRC – The Trust Land Division of DNRC manages 6 million acres of land plus 6+ million acres of subsurface minerals. The state collects \$350,000 in recreation fees state wide. Under newly passed legislation, a \$2.00 conservation fee is added to hunting, fishing and trapping licenses. It is estimated that this fee will generate \$1 million of which 10% will go to weeds and road management. If you don’t buy a license, then a recreational use permit costs \$10.00. Historically, private property owners did not allow public access to Beaver Lake until 1986 Skyles to Beaver Road.

Partnerships between state and private entities should designate where state and private lands start and stop. Private interests are less likely to provide access for recreational purposes.

Beaver Lake has produced 70 million board feet over 70 years of timber management. There are also 20 cabin sites there, 18 on the north side and 2 on the south. State-wide, agricultural uses and grazing produce the most revenue for the State.

The Whitefish area is a recreation destination.

Ideas

- \$ Developers pay a recreation fee and cluster their development.
- \$ Option – create a fee scale. Pay a recreation permit fee plus an optional fee for managing the lands.
- \$ More information is needed to tell people that they need a permit.

Workshop #4 – 7:00 P.M, Wednesday, June 25th, 2003, O’Shaughnessy Center

Attendees:

Courtney Feldt (?)
Annelies Pederson
Don Harring
Steve Larson (?)
Pete Thomas
Souheir Rawlings
Bonnie Hodges
Diane Conradi
Lisa Jones
Jan Brunk
Steve Thompson
Jessie Deats
Jessie’s mom
Ann Lawson
Ken Ellis
Steve Brown
Sheila Bowen
Rob Garcia
Vonda Garcia
Becky Omax ?
Heather Greenly
Mike Jenson
Pete Ellsworth
Charles Harring (Chuck Haney?)
Susan Whitaker

Notes and Comments:

Spencer Lake – The KM ranch road adjacent to the Spencer area is “hopping” Friends of the Spencer are concerned about urban encroachment. The KM road area is an important recreational area – particularly for biking, and Spencer is part of an important wildlife corridor. The land is “sacred”. Recreational access to Spencer is important. Spencer is also home to a rare orchid.

Beaver-Skyles Lake – Properties which border Skyles Lake use to be open 30-40 years ago and now in accessible. These area provide important recreational opportunities, particularly for horse back riding. The recent obliteration of the road to Beaver Lake raises some questions regarding the DNRC’s commitment to this plan and to public access. Maintaining access to Beaver Lake is very important.

Haskill Basin – Haskill offers opportunities for hiking, bikikng and skiing.

General Comments – There is concern regarding the lack of state-wide planning as a framework within which to conduct this plan. Every single section is important for the

area's tourism and recreation, serious components of the local economy. Natural resources must be considered. Mountain biking opportunities are important to the community. There is a certain amount of frustration with the DNRC and its relationship with local recreational organizations. Local groups want to make user permits available more widely and they have faced a difficult bureaucracy in trying to achieve this. Recreationists want to be part of the solution. These lands provide opportunities to hunt, fish and cross country ski. Declining water quality is a problem. The area provides important wildlife habitat and is a "gateway" to Glacier National Park. Development is degrading wildlife habitat. The "emerging" economy of Flathead County is based on tourism related to open space, wildlife and recreation. These values contribute to the overall quality of life and therefore to the economy, which in turn helps support our schools. There has been so much construction here since the 1970s.

The plan should emphasize multiple uses including all season recreation. Whitefish is suffering the impact associated with the building of upper (high) end housing (elite). The community is concerned about rising land values. The plan should address issues of equity and affordability and not perpetuate elitism.

Why can't we maintain the status quo? Can the lands continue to be managed for timber and recreation?

The degradation of Whitefish Lake is a problem. Our population is growing, resulting in changing impacts on the land. Recreation can be damaging as well. We have to learn to manage change.

Members of the community are worried about sprawl. As lands are developed and pressures increase, local citizens are worried about affordability – can they afford to live in Whitefish?

Recreation is a renewable resource. A recent meeting which included recreational users and representatives from Stoltze lumber (Ron Buentemeir) provided an opportunity for everyone to understand each other's problems and concerns. People do have an understanding of these concerns – management, vandalism, impacts, etc.

People who come to Whitefish have the expectation of recreation and open space.

The plan should consider the long term benefit rather than short term value of selling the land.

It's important to preserve open space for its own sake. Land is valuable as open space.

Ideas

- \$ Let's get the word out about people needing to buy permits for recreational uses on State Lands.
- \$ Glacier Cyclery can sell permits
- \$ DNRC needs to adequately sign its lands so the public knows where they are.
- \$ The plan should address the long term economic impact of the state lands and their uses

- \$ Montana should consider a state-wide tax (on the income tax) for the school trust so that these lands don't have to produce as much revenue.
- \$ Data should be collected regarding the level of current use by equestrians and cyclists.
- \$ The DNRC could initiate an "adopt a fishing access" program or something similar for maintenance, similar to the "adopt a highway" program.
- \$ The Prickly Pear Land Trust in Helena may provide a model – contact Dave Ashley
- \$ Consider public/private partners

Through the course of the meetings the following questions were raised by those that attended:

Questions

- \$ How many recreational permits does the state currently issue for these lands?
- \$ What are the public rights on these lands?
- \$ Why is the DNRC starting with the Whitefish Area?
- \$ Why isn't this a statewide plan?
- \$ What is the status of the Programmatic EIS regarding DNRC planning efforts?
- \$ What happens if the plan is not approved by the local governing bodies?
- \$ What is the current revenue on these lands and is there a target which the agency is looking for?
- \$ What are the roles of the Land Board and the Beneficiaries in this process?